

FIRST 5 SHASTA

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How Are the Children? Proposition 10 is Shaping Up

“I wonder if every adult among us, parent and non-parent alike, felt an equal weight for the daily care and protection of all the children in our town, in our state, in our country. . . I wonder if we could truly say without hesitation, “the children are well, yes, all the children are well.”

Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O'Neill, First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church (Framingham, MA)

A child's future is shaped by his/her first experiences. Parents and caregivers, the primary adult influences in a young child's life, offer experiences to infants and toddlers that are crucial to all areas of healthy development. These experiences have an amazing impact on the critical formation of the brain's structure, which can shape the way a child learns, thinks and behaves.

Research has emerged in the last decade confirming the significant role environment and relationships play in the healthy physical, emotional and intellectual development of children. In response to these findings, the California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10) was enacted by voters in 1998. The result is approximately \$700 million (yes, \$700 million!) every year in revenues directed statewide toward the support of the prenatal period to age five.

The Prop 10 initiative added an additional 50-cents-per-pack tax to cigarettes and a comparable tax to other tobacco products. The California Children and Families Commission receives these monies and retains twenty percent to use for statewide education and outreach, such as the “Kit for New Parents” program. The other eighty percent goes directly to County Commissions established throughout the state. The number of live births reported annually in each county determines the amount of Prop 10 revenues allocated to each. County Commissions use these funds to develop and expand local programs for young children and their families.

The Shasta Children and Families First Commission (SCFFC) receives about \$1.8 million each year from Prop 10 revenues based on an estimated 1,600 live births each year. To determine how this money might be used to make the greatest difference in the lives of young children, the Shasta Commission turned to local parents, caregivers and child advocacy groups. A series of focus groups held in 2000 allowed SCFFC to meet with parents of young children and service providers across the county, who expressed a variety of needs with many common themes. This process helped SCFFC develop a strategic plan that is truly responsive to the needs and interests of young children and their families.

The SCFFC Strategic Plan identifies four goals that will guide the work of the Shasta Commission for the next three to five years. These goals support the SCFFC vision of a community working together to provide environments that allow all young children to learn, play and reach their potential. To achieve this, the Shasta Commission has committed to educating the community on the importance of early childhood development and child learning. It also seeks to insure that services and resources will be readily accessible for all families and that local

policies and funding resources are focused on children age 0-to-5 years old. Finally, it aims for healthy children who are ready to learn.

In an effort to address these goals, SCFFC opened its first large-scale grant opportunity to the community in June 2001. A Request for Proposals generated responses from grassroots organizations and direct service organizations seeking to develop or expand programs and activities for children in the prenatal stage to five years of age. This process concluded with \$5.4 million being committed to approximately twenty-four grantees for projects that will come to fruition over the next four years.

Seven grant awards were approved for community-based and parent driven projects such as play parks for young children, early literacy and storytelling programs, doula (experienced woman/mother) support for new mothers/families, and parent education/support. Grantees will use creative approaches for delivering parent education in areas including nutrition, childhood anemia, obesity, and the adverse effects of childhood exposure to violence.

Seventeen grant awards were approved for the development of direct professional services. These projects range from breastfeeding resources to maternal/infant mental health to a state-of-the-art neonatal intensive care unit at a local hospital. One project will result in the development of a universal screening system that will help health care providers identify families that may have the strongest need for early intervention services – before their baby is even born. It is amazing to think how all of these services can work together to improve the quality of life for so many children and families!

Joining the Shasta Commission in serving the northstate are neighboring Tehama, Butte, and Siskiyou Counties. Each County Commission has developed a unique approach to using its Prop 10 funds based on extensive input from local communities.

The Tehama County Children and Families Commission receives about \$600,000 annually in Prop 10 revenues based on an estimated 651 live births in Tehama County each year. Denise Snider, Executive Director of the Tehama Commission, reports the recent award of six significant grants to Tehama County programs and activities. These grant allocations will disburse approximately \$808,000 over the next couple of years. The result is increased and improved child care options, expanding prevention outreach with home visiting programs, and expansion of WIC (Women, Infants and Children) and Family Resource Center parent education and support services.

The Butte County Children and Families Commission receives about \$2 million annually in Prop 10 revenues based on an estimated 2,000 live births in Butte County each year. Cheryl Giscombe, Program Manager, reports the Butte Commission is gathering steam with the rollout of its second round of grant funding. To date, the Butte Commission has allocated over \$2.5 million to eleven projects and thirty mini-grants. In addition, it has committed substantial funds to “Project REWARD” to boost the county’s child care workforce by providing incentives to child care workers. The Butte Commission will partner with the California Commission and receive matching funds to offer cash incentives to child care workers who demonstrate longevity in their positions and commitment to continuing education or training in their field.

Remote Siskiyou County receives about \$550,000 annually in Prop 10 revenues based on an estimated 460 live births each year in the county. Susan Wilson, Executive Director of the Siskiyou Children and Families Commission, describes the current Siskiyou focus as capacity building in communities. Rather than award grant funds, the Siskiyou Commission elected to offer funds to ten population “hubs” as seed money to begin a community capacity building

process. The ten communities receiving funding include Butte Valley, Dunsmuir, McCloud, Montague, Mount Shasta, Scott Valley, Tulelake and Weed. These communities were allocated between \$15,000 and \$30,000 each and have identified local needs and how they would best benefit from Prop 10 funds. The Siskiyou “hubs” are entering into the second phase of capacity building as they select projects and programs to support their efforts.

Ambitious? You bet! These northstate efforts are just a beginning. They represent an initial investment in creating a comprehensive and integrated system of information and services that promote early childhood development, thus helping every adult, every parent, shape our children’s chances for a healthy and successful future. As the benefits of Prop 10 continue to evolve and broaden for the state of California, so will the opportunities and benefits broaden for all counties in the state.

The Shasta Children and Families First Commission is gearing up to broaden its areas of focus in the coming year. Areas of priority being considered include child care, tobacco and substance abuse prevention, and oral health. Ultimately, the Shasta Commission challenges its communities and every community member to place a continuing priority on young children.

How are the children? In time, the results of the Prop 10 investment will be shown as people across the northstate ponder this question and can reply, without hesitation, “The children are well, yes, all the children are well.”

First 5 Shasta, the Shasta Children and Families First Commission , was established after California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs to promote early childhood development for expectant parents and children up to age five. The Shasta Commission receives approximately \$1.8 million annually in Prop 10 revenues.